

Quaker Committee on Kentucky Legislation

3050 Bon Air Avenue

Louisville, KY 40205

502/452-6812

Quakers Urge More Equitable Tax Policies

The Quaker Committee on Kentucky Legislation speaking on behalf of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Kentucky believes we are all called to take care of one another. We are called, in particular, to care for the most vulnerable among us: children, the elderly, the ill, and the poor. Beyond this, we are called to work for a society where all persons – all children of God – have the same opportunity to become fully productive members of society.

We believe that budgets are moral documents. They spell out how we as a society will organize to serve one another. It's a moral decision to raise enough money so that Kentucky can adequately address the needs of all her citizens. How we raise the money we spend is also a moral issue.

We all own the shameful results of decades of legislative inaction on tax reform. Recently, Kentucky's residents ranked:

- 49th out of 50 on six measures of overall well being (life evaluation, emotional health, work environment, physical health, healthy behaviors and access to basic necessities);
- 41st out of 50 in death rates from major diseases;
- 48th in the percentage of our population with college diplomas; and
- 48th among the states in per capita investment in K-12 education.

Because our income tax is only weakly progressive and our sales taxes strongly regressive, many of our richest citizens contribute a lower total percentage of their income to government than people who make much less money. Isn't it fair to ask those individuals and businesses who have benefited the most from our infrastructure of roads, schools, hospitals, and a financial and legal system built by preceding generations to contribute more to maintain and expand it?

Given that Kentucky was behind to start with, there is little chance that our current level of revenues and investments will catch us up. And there is a good chance that Kentucky will actually fall farther behind. Two decades after the last in-depth look at our tax system, this is no time for timid changes around the edges. Please be bold, and work to pass your recommendations.

Quaker Committee on Kentucky Legislation (QCKL) is the public voice for Kentucky Quakers on state, national, and international issues. QCKL focuses education and advocacy on only those issues on which all Kentucky Quaker Meetings have united.

We want now to share our convictions, and our commitment to support you in their implementation. First, though, some general thoughts about direction:

In part because we want the total tax burden shared more progressively, we stand strongly against expansion of gambling as a source of additional revenues. We also oppose any increase in sales taxes on any basic products. These disproportionately increase total tax burden on the poor, who can least afford them.

Kentucky Quakers are in unity, though, in their support for increasing revenues through additional taxation in order to adequately fund health, education, and other infrastructure needed to provide equal opportunities and a safety net for all Kentuckians. Specifically we urge and will vocally support your bold leadership for:

- 1) a progressive income tax system with more brackets for higher income residents, and increasing rates according to ability to pay;
- 2) an expanded state-level earned income tax credit to help those just on the fringe of poverty;
- 3) further increases to the cigarette excise tax to both raise revenues and drive down the numbers of teenagers who start smoking every year; and
- 4) establishing a Kentucky estate tax with modest exemption limits.

We fervently hope you will work with the legislature to invest in Kentuckians by making our tax system fairer and bringing in the income we so desperately need to adequately address our citizens' needs for better education and health care. This is not only the right thing to do; it is the smart thing to do. The more of us who are able to contribute to the common wealth of this Commonwealth, the better off we will all be.

Richard Mitchell
Quaker Committee on Kentucky Legislation
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